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ABSTRACT

Since development communication began in Africa in the 1950s, it has been based on the erroneous belief, first, that development meant westernization and, later, that it meant modernization. This led to two working assumptions: that money and educated (qualified) personnel were all that was needed to create development; and that all efforts should be concentrated on the rural areas. Because development has been misinterpreted to mean modernization, all efforts have been geared towards education for certification, urbanization, personal wealth accumulation, building of skyscrapers, and fruitless efforts at living like people in the Western world. In the next millennium, development communication efforts should be directed more towards enlightening the elite segment of the African population. A key factor in social development and change is education for practical and restrictive purposes--as a means of development, improving the welfare of all. It is generally acquired through open discussions between leaders and the people, community brainstorming, town meetings, purposive inservice training, seminars, workshops, and field experiences made possible through development communication, particularly through development oriented news and information from the media of mass communication. But mass media efforts must be supplemented with interpersonal communication to assure success. (NKA)

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DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM:
Which way for Africa?

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> To build a nation properly we need to train and educate our youths in the right direction. But regardless of the magnitude and efficiency of our formal education system, the foundation of the new nation would not be well and truly laid unless the parents of our youths are themselves well-informed and appreciative of the blessings of true nationhood
>
> .....Chief A.Y. Eke, 1972.

Since development communication began in Africa in the 1950s, it has been based, on the erroneous belief, first, that development meant Westernization, and later that it meant Modernization. On this basis, it was reasonable to hold that those who needed development communication or development education were the unschooled and impoverished inhabitants of the rural communities and the conurbation slums. This belief led to two working assumptions:-

a. **That money and educated (qualified) personnel were all that was needed to create development**. The traditional knowledge of the people; their socio-cultural characteristics; and their ways of life were not seen as important. Even after UNESCO (1975) had categorically stated that knowledge of target audience characteristics was extremely important for development success, development programs and development communicators seem not to have taken notice;
b. **All efforts should be concentrated on the rural areas**. Concentration on rural development was an admission that the cities and urban areas, the political and economic elite, and the educated do not need development communication/education. We assumed that they knew and understood, and were willing to make necessary sacrifice to advance the course of development. How wrong were we, and how wrong have we continued to be!!

For development efforts to be meaningful and productive, both development communicators and target audiences must -

Knowing what to do
Knowing how to do them
Being willing to do them
Having the resources to do them

It is expected that the elite in society, the government and industrial organizations should take responsibility for the last of the above necessary conditions, and share responsibility for the first three with development communicators and the community. Unfortunately, their response has been not only been very abysmal but also misdirected. Because development has been misinterpreted to mean modernization, all efforts have been geared towards education for certification instead of for certitude, urbanization, personal wealth accumulation, building of skyscrapers, owning of fleet of cars, and fruitless efforts at living like people in the Western world. Is it any wonder that Africa has not achieved any significant success at causing real development?

We, the development communicators, also have our share of the shame of misinterpretation and misdirection. We were all taken in by the wrong assumptions of the political and economic elite. We followed them almost blindly. As someone who has spent most his life propagating the advantages development communication and concentrating almost all efforts

on rural development, believing that positive change in the rural sector of the economy would be a catalyst to national development, I feel a strong sense of failure and shame. Failure, because in spite of the efforts made at conducting development education geared towards building understanding and creating participation in the task of rural development, there seems to be no significant change in the situations of rural Africa.

At the African Council for Communication Education conference held in Ghana in 1994, I prefaced my presentation with this statement: "After many years of political independence, Africa is not only not progressing; she is retrograding". That statement evoked the anger many participants, not the least of whom was a Nigerian who angrily pointed out that many beautiful buildings were put up along Lagos-Ibadan expressway in Nigeria; that from what he had seen in Accra, the same could be said of Ghana and many other cities in Africa. He ended his tirade by saying: "If these are not enough signs of development, then I do not know what development is". But when I asked him, if he was still able in 1994 to send to his mother the same amount in allowance as he did in 1984, he did not answer!

For the last two years of my primary education, I went to school in a village seven miles away from mine. The road, owned and maintained by

the Local Council, was laid with laterite and was so smooth and safe that we (there were four of us) could ride our bicycles virtually with our eyes closed. And we went to school alone (we were between 13 and 15 years old) very early in the morning and came back after 7 p.m. This was 1959-1960. By 1970 it became dangerous to use that road after five o'clock in the evening; and today, the road is no more. Yet the two villages have produced more than a thousand university graduates, a hundred lawyers, numerous high school teachers and so on. I have no doubt that this unfortunate and regrettable example of retrogression is not unique to my rural area. What has happened to development communication/education?

The answer to that question lies in Chief Eke's warning quoted above. And it also leads to why I feel ashamed. I, and others like me in the development communication field, have no excuse for not recognizing that the exclusion of the urban elite and the educated from the list of those that need development education would adversely affect the efforts directed at rural development. While we "preached" that development was not Westernization, we unconsciously affirmed that it was through assuming that the educated, political and economic leaders, and the urban elite in general have no need for development education. We even confirmed this unconscious affirmation by assuming that they understood what

development was and were ready to participate as initiators, sponsors, and providers of the resources necessary for rural development. If we had paid enough attention to Chief Eke's warning, we would have known that the first set of citizens to whom to direct development communication efforts are the leaders, the urban elite, and the educated. It goes without saying that unless the leaders and the educated know and understand they cannot act decidedly and intelligently, and with the interest of the nation at heart.

It seems obvious therefore that, in the next millennium, development communication efforts should be directed more towards enlightening the 'academically trained and the politically conscious' segment of African population. There can be no more convincing reason for doing this than the disgraceful performance of African leaders and their cohorts, the selfishness of those expected to exhibit practical examples of patriotism, and the degrading attitude of the general public who, in imitation of the leaders, seem to have made the accumulation of personal material wealth, by any means possible, the chief goal for living. As Frederick Harbison (1963) has rightly noted, "the progress of a nation depends first and foremost on the progress of its people. Unless it develops their spirit and human potentials, it cannot develop much else – materially, economically, politically or culturally".

A key factor in social development and change seen as implying each person's right to realize his/her own potential and to contribute to and share in national development is Education – but not education for its own sake – for selfish material progress; it has to be education for more practical and restrictive purposes – as a means of development, of improving the welfare of all. This type of education has never had, and is not likely to ever have, a place in the formal school system. It is generally acquired through open discussions between leaders and the people, community brain-storming, town meetings, purposive in-service training, seminars, workshops, and field experiences made possible through development communication or development education, and in particular through development oriented news and information from the media of mass communication. And it is the type of education that the elite, the educated and the political leaders need in order, not only to understand what true development is, but also to become sensitive to the role or roles expected of them as those who "must show the light so that others can follow".

In a guideline for research proposal submitted to IDRC, Charles Okigbo listed some of what Afropessimists have enumerated as the manifestations of under-development that still plague Africa. They include:

- Worsening economic situation, with many countries achieving less than

zero growth; regression on politics and governance, with the ever-present threats to democracy and social justice; depressing statistics on health for all, especially children and women; and widespread environmental degradation. These are fundamental problems of development; they are neither exclusively rural nor exclusively urban. They are national development problems requiring national solutions, the responsibility for which rests on national leaders. But unless these leaders "are well-informed and appreciative of the blessings of nationhood" they cannot, and even if they can, may not be willing to make the necessary sacrifice required to solve the problems. Here lies the importance of development education which concerns itself with everything that affects the well-being of all citizens within a given community – extending its role from one of the traditional concept of teaching children to one of identifying the needs, problems and wants of a community and then assisting in the development of facilities, programs, staff and leadership towards the end of improving the entire community.

Because this is a task directed at recharting the education of the educated, any of the media of mass communication is appropriate both for dissemination and for exchange of ideas. But the utilization of these media must be carefully planned; both what is put in the media and what people do

with what they get from the media must be directed towards causing positive changes in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres. The mode of operation must not be based on the Development Media theory which is the prevailing theory in African today; rather it should be based on the Democratic-Participant Media theory which emphasizes availability of media infrastructure; accessibility to available media, and purposive utilization of media messages and information. This is not calling for development journalism, but for development communication through the media. The difference is significant. The former is basically provision of development information, in many cases, as the government wants it. The latter is both provision of information and effective exchange of ideas and opinions on the information provided as well as relating of such information to previous discussions and future perspectives.

A note of warning is appropriate here. Important though the media are because of their potential for area coverage and their speed of dissemination, research has shown that they are not usually able to succeed in changing people's attitude, let alone cause them to behave according to the demands of messages. Therefore, mass media efforts must be supplemented with interpersonal communication in order to assure success. This is calling for Integrated Communication Strategy. This combines the Interpersonal and

Mass Media strategies, carefully eliminating their limitations and maximizing their potentials and strengths. The strategy, using the mass media, feeds the interpersonal and traditional networks within the audience with relevant information that would generate positive discussions which, in turn, would lead to intelligent understanding of development objectives and each person's and each group's role in achieving those objectives. The use of the integrated approach gains support in the findings of the research on the use of Radio for Education and Development by Rogers (1977) and his colleagues. The researchers found that the combination of a mass medium with an interpersonal channel is generally more effective than using either alone.

The worst type of ignorance is that which is cloaked with assumed knowledge. Here, the adage that "he who does not know, and does not know that he does not know, is a fool; ....." is very apt. We prided ourselves with the conviction that we 'knew' how. Because in reality we did not know how, we erroneously concluded that the only segments of African society that needed development education were the rural and impoverished segments. Like putting the cart before the horse, we concentrated development communication efforts only on the rural communities. The result has been dismal. Not only did we not move forward, but we dropped back farther than we were before we began.

This must not be allowed to continue. We need a new direction. It seems that this new way to go is to pay serious attention to re-educating our leaders, the educated and elite in society. This will provide a solid foundation for making real efforts towards achieving real development. When they are well informed and begin to appreciate the blessings of nationhood, the task of getting to the rural communities with development education, and winning their support and participation is likely to be easier and more effective.